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The Radical Left's Turn towards Civil Society in Greece: One Strategy, Two Paths

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The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) made remarkable 'turns towards civil society' over the last decade. It is argued that this was primarily a response aimed at strengthening their social legitimacy, which had reached its lowest point in the early 1990s. Differences in the way the two parties attempted to stabilise and engage their membership and re-establish links to trade unions and new social movements can be attributed to their distinct ideological and organisational legacies. Despite those differences, their respective linkage strategies were both successful until the game-changing 2012 Greek national elections, which brought about the remarkable rise of SYRIZA and the electoral demise of the KKE.

Keywords: Greek Political Parties; Radical Left; Linkage; Parties and Interest Groups; Economic Crisis; KKE; SYN; SYRIZA

Kay Lawson's seminal work treated political parties as two-way mediating mechanisms that link the preferences of citizens to the political process (Lawson 1980). The contemporary study of party change has documented a notable weakening of those links over recent decades. Social and technological change has triggered a process of party adaptation whereby parties principally rely on media campaigns and state funding to ensure their electoral survival (Katz & Mair 1995), not on the mobilisation of their own partisans (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). Furthermore, given that parties need flexibility to respond to social change by broadening their appeal and diversifying their programmatic offer, they have distanced themselves from trade unions and other organisations of civil society (Allern & Bale 2012). Linkage has thus been assumed to have fallen lower in the list of parties' priorities. This state of affairs may not necessarily threaten mainstream parties' electoral survival, but it may place their

legitimacy in question to the extent that they are perceived to have turned their backs on their grassroots.

Radical left parties' legitimacy can be argued to be more dependent on the pursuit of linkage than the legitimacy of mainstream catch-all parties. This is because their core ideology is closely connected to notions of social representation: whether they come from a communist tradition that conceptualises the party as a representative of working class interests, or a left-libertarian tradition that emphasises notions of internal party democracy and bottom-up participation (Kitschelt 1988), radical left parties must be shown to actively maintain close links to their social constituency if they are to justify their *raison d'être*. Government participation, an option that radical left parties have been taking up more frequently in recent years (Bale & Dunphy 2011), can be argued to strengthen perceptions that these parties have distanced themselves from their particular social constituency. This is because being part of a coalition government increases the probability of a radical left party agreeing to measures and policies its grassroots would not choose. Furthermore, because they start from a weaker electoral position than mainstream parties (March 2011), their electoral survival may also be at risk if their legitimacy is weakened. This predicament may well be expected to make linkage a matter of higher priority for radical left parties. The more the legitimacy of radical parties is in question, the more we can expect them to pursue linkage, adapting their organisational routines and programmatic offer to suit that purpose. The way they do so can be expected to be much more dependent on their past ideological and institutional trajectories precisely because they are parties whose legitimacy inherently depends on ideological consistency and representation of, or active engagement with, a *particular* social or political constituency.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the two established parties of the Greek radical left, the Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος (Communist Party of Greece, KKE) and the Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς, της Οικολογίας και των Κινημάτων (Coalition of the Left, Ecology and Social Movements, SYN) made a remarkable 'turn towards civil society', reflected in an attempt to consolidate their membership base and renew their cadre pool; a marked reinvestment was made in creating 'microcosms' that link their broader electorate to the party, as well as a visible effort to reconfirm existing links and forge new links to trade unions and social movements. Despite this common strategic shift towards reprioritising linkage, there are pronounced differences both in terms of how the two parties have pursued this strategy and the implications this has had for their own organisational development and electoral fortunes.

The next section will set out the context within which the two parties of the Greek radical left have reprioritised linkage and explore the factors that explain this development. We expect to find that the parties of the Greek left invested in linkage in response to a weakening of their legitimacy. The two following sections will look at what KKE's and SYN's 'turn towards civil society' has meant for the way they articulate their appeal to particular social constituencies, their participatory linkages and their environmental linkage, particularly in what concerns trade unions and social movements. We expect to find that ideological and institutional legacy will explain

differences between the two parties. The final section will focus on the two parties' linkage strategies during the economic crisis.

Relevant data have been gathered by examining party statutes, congress documents and statements in the party press and conducting nine semi-structured interviews over 2011 with leading cadres of the KKE, SYN and their youth wings, trade unionists and representatives of social movements affiliated or otherwise related to the two parties of the Greek radical left.

The Greek Radical Left's Turn towards Civil Society

The history of the Greek radical left is marked by a bitter division (February 1968) inside the KKE and the subsequent establishment of the Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος Εσωτερικού (Communist Party of Greece of the Interior, KKE-es) by expelled cadres. The origins of the split lay in the different positions taken on the KKE's political direction and organisational strategy, respectively by the party cadres that operated illegally inside Greece and those in exile in Eastern Europe (Kapetanyannis 1979) before and during the military dictatorship (1967–74). The former were in favour of an open mass party organisation based on a broad political coalition that would extend beyond communist forces, while the latter insisted on preserving the party's Marxist–Leninist characteristics. The split became final after the August 1968 Soviet invasion of Prague, when the cadres of the Interior took a critical stance against the invasion, while those of the KKE remained loyal to Moscow (Clogg 1987, p. 177). After the transition to democracy in 1974, KKE and KKE-es followed two different political trajectories, respectively 'orthodox' and Eurocommunist (Kalyvas & Marantzidis 2002), the former being consistently more successful than the latter in electoral terms. However, the warring comrades joined forces again in 1988 (Verney 1989). International and national developments were favourable to this rapprochement.

Gorbachev's 'perestroika' had allowed a softening of the lines of division and a large section of the younger cadres of the KKE was in search of a new direction that would involve internal democratisation, programmatic renewal and an opening to new issues, such as the environment and gender equality, a direction that the KKE-es had already taken some time before. On the domestic front, the left's social democratic competitor, Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα (Panhellenic Socialist Movement, PASOK), lay in tatters. The socialist Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou and his key associates were under accusation of scandal, which involved party funding from illicit sources and revealed the extensive clientelistic linkages between business interests and politics which had been built up under PASOK's eight-year rule. Leadership in both parties of the radical left saw an opportunity for cooperation against a formidable common enemy caught in a moment of weakness (Kapetanyannis 1993). In the eyes of the two parties' elites, PASOK was the main benefactor of post-1974 radicalisation and an exploiter of the left's discourse, social base and political tradition.

It was these factors that led to the formation of the electoral *Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς και της Προόδου* (Coalition of the Left and Progress) which contested three national elections (June 1989, November 1989, 1990) (Table 1) and participated in an unlikely government alliance with the mainstream centre-right party *Νέα Δημοκρατία* (New Democracy, ND) under the premiership of Tzannis Tzannetakis (Pridham & Verney 1991). The government's official purpose was to send the former prime minister to trial and impose a clean-up of the corrupt clientelistic politics of the time. The left's informal aim was to ensure that PASOK would no longer be able to form single-party governments.

This strategy was destructive for both parties of the radical left, but more so for the larger partner, the KKE. Since the political division between left and right which goes back to the Civil War (1946–49) remained deeply embedded in Greek political culture, leftist voters did not appreciate the decision of the left parties' leaderships to engage in government cooperation with the centre-right; moreover, the stated aim of the Tzannetakis government was not achieved: after a long judicial process there was ultimately very little 'cleaning up'. After the electoral downturn for the left in the 1990 national elections which saw the centre-right ND form a new single-party government, the KKE pulled out of the coalition and lost 40 per cent of its cadres after a major party split in the party's 13th Congress (February 1991) (Doukas 1991). The former coalition was re-established as a unified party, which included cadres from the former KKE-es and the breakaway 'modernising' cadres from the KKE.

In the first part of the 1990s, the Greek left as a whole was thus delegitimised in the eyes of its traditional electorate, bruised by participation in government with the centre-right and experienced internal strife and extensive demobilisation of party members, while the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) added an identity crisis to its woes. The extent to which the left's legitimacy had been damaged was only partially reflected in the drop of the two parties' aggregate vote share, evident in the second national election of 1989, and subsequently the elections that took place in 1990 and 1993 (Table 1).

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s neither of the radical left parties, more in SYN's case and less so in the case of the KKE, shied away from office-seeking. This was evident in their accommodating stance towards PASOK trade unionists in the steering bodies of the official trade union confederations, at the level of local politics where both parties of the radical left often participated in governing coalitions with PASOK, as well as in their participation in the Tzannetakis government when the opportunity to contest PASOK's dominance of the centre-left emerged. Throughout this period, both parties invested their resources in local government, official trade union politics and during the Tzannetakis government in their parliamentary and ministerial presence. At the same time they neglected linkage, when it came both to their own members and to their links with their trade union grassroots and the new social movements. After the de-legitimation suffered in the early 1990s, an office-seeking strategy was clearly no longer a viable option for either of the two radical left parties, which were now aiming for survival, in competition with PASOK and with each other,

Table 1 KKE and SYN Vote Shares (%) and Seats in National and European Elections

National elections	1989	1989	1990	1993	1996	2000	2004	2007	2009	2012 (May)	2012 (June)
KKE	13.1 (28)	11 (21)	10.3 (19)	4.5 (9)	5.6 (11)	5.5 (11)	5.9 (12)	8.1 (22)	7.5 (21)	8.5 (26)	4.5 (12)
SYN				2.9 (0)	5.1 (10)	3.2 (6)					
SYRIZA							3.3 (6)	5 (14)	4.6 (13)	16.8 (52)	26.9 (71)
European elections	1989				1994	1999	2004		2009		
KKE		6.3 (2)	8.7 (3)	9.5 (3)	8.3 (2)						
SYN	14.3 (4)	6.3 (2)	5.2 (2)								
SYRIZA				4.1 (1)	4.7 (1)						

Source: Greek Ministry of the Interior, available online at: <http://www.ypes.gr/en/Elections>

Notes: The 1989–90 national and 1989 European election results refer to Synaspismos as an electoral coalition. SYN took part in all national elections from 2004 onwards and in the 2009 European election as part of the SYRIZA coalition. All numbers in parentheses refer to parliamentary seats.

in what at the time seemed to be a limited electoral space; their assessment was that they needed to reclaim their legitimacy before they could begin to raise their hopes about their electoral performance.

A new strategy was thus called for: they would need to rewire themselves in order to fulfil a protest role vis-à-vis the established party 'cartel', re-emphasise their ideology, distinct policies and principles and rearticulate their appeal to their traditional constituency. A key plank of their strategy involved a turn towards civil society, evident after the end of the 1990s, which included a reformulation of their social and programmatic appeal, a rearrangement of their internal organisation with the aim of preserving their membership levels and a pronounced investment in maintaining existing organisational links and establishing new links to trade unions and social movements.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE)

The KKE is considered one of the most strictly 'orthodox' communist parties and basic trustees of the Soviet political and ideological tradition in Europe (March 2011, pp. 52–56). The party that rose from the ashes of the 1991 split achieved its political survival by mobilising core political and ideological resources from its political tradition, engaging in a process that could be described as an organisational and programmatic 'rebolshevisation' (Eleftheriou, forthcoming). The party's 'dominant coalition' interpreted the post-1991 political environment as extremely hostile to the KKE and implemented an introvert, yet aggressive, party strategy whose aim has been the formation of a cohesive electoral and membership base. It was that cohesion which in the leadership's view would ensure the party's survival.

A basic programmatic trait of the KKE since the mid-1990s has been the pursuit of an 'anti-imperialist anti-monopoly democratic front of struggle' (KKE 1996a), a social coalition that is the precondition for the construction of a political front and is meant to function as a stepping stone for the transition to socialism. The party's priority, in other words, is to construct strong ties with the working class and other 'popular strata' such as the 'semi-proletarians, poor farmers and the most oppressed urban petty bourgeois strata' (KKE 1996a). The KKE's role is to direct these social forces to the fulfilment of the socialist prospect. Its organisation and ancillary structures are the basic channels of this strategy.

In terms of participatory linkage, the KKE as a Marxist–Leninist political party follows an extremely strict statute that defines its internal functioning. The present Statutes (KKE 1996b) were approved by the party's 15th Congress, which was pivotal for the KKE's subsequent development. The Statutes declare 'democratic centralism' to be the party's basic organisational principle (Article 9) and set out the centralised architecture of the party on a 'production-based' or 'territorial' basis (Article 13), pointing to the leading role of Central Committee and Political Bureau (Articles 14–33), mandating the creation of extraordinary 'party groups' in civil society

organisations (Article 42) and setting the ground rules for communists' behaviour in public office (Article 43).

The KKE's aim is to consolidate a centralised and tightly controlled top-down party organisation, capable of recruiting and mobilising highly confident and determined members. To this end, the party maintains a strict method of recruitment which requires the candidate member to prove his or her merits in the 'political field' after being recommended to the party by two KKE members. The 1989–91 outbreak of internal dissent instilled a sense of self-preservation amongst the ranks of the KKE's new leadership, which linked party reconstruction to internal coherence. Factionalism is not tolerated and party purges of dissident voices have been known to occur. The KKE goes to great lengths to maintain secrecy regarding its membership levels and does not release official figures. Based on party funding data, Vernardakis estimates that the KKE had about 40,000 members in the early 1990s (2011, p. 76). Due to the Κομμουνιστική Νεολαία Ελλάδος (Communist Youth of Greece, KNE) enjoying an increase in membership since the late 1990s, and to judge from the visible strengthening of the KKE's presence in street demonstrations over the last decade, it can safely be assumed that the KKE's membership base has since grown. Unfortunately, data on the precise percentage of this increase are not available.

In practice, a very important organisational intervention that has taken place over the last decade has been the restructuring of the party's militant grassroots on a professional basis at the expense of the territorial principle. This change has had two main implications. First, the organisation's capacity as an electoral machine at local level has been greatly decreased. In national elections, the KKE is partly dependent upon labour-intensive campaigns; nevertheless, its communication strategies are highly centralised and its usage of new technologies and mass media—through the party's own newspaper and TV and radio stations—extensive. Second, the party's political action is predominantly oriented towards trade unions and workplaces; this means that party cadres are 'trained' to become union leaders or functionaries rather than public office holders.

In terms of the KKE's links to its ancillary structures, the most important development was the setting up of the Πανεργατικό Αγωνιστικό Μέτωπο (All Workers' Militant Front, PAME) in the late 1990s. In a context of diminishing union density¹ in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s the marked increase in the number of precarious workers in Greece, especially among young people (Kretsos 2011), was a challenge for the Γενική Συνομοσπονδία Εργατών Ελλάδας (General Confederation of Greek Labour, GSEE)² as representative of the Greek workforce (Matsaganis 2007, pp. 541–545). The KKE's political rhetoric targeted these by and large non-unionised social groups, but the foundation of party cells in the new types of workplace was a difficult task. Moreover, the GSEE's dominance by mainstream political forces made it difficult for the KKE to pursue its own contentious political practices, which were in turn standing in the way of the party's political aims. At the time, it was felt that the KKE's longstanding ancillary organisation in the trade unions, the Ενιαία Συνδικαλιστική Αγωνιστική Κίνηση (Unified Trade Union Militant

Movement, ESAK), the aim of which is principally to present candidates for trade union elections at the confederate, federal and local level, was not up to the task at hand. It was therefore considered necessary for the KKE to explore new forms of intervention and mobilisation in the trade union movement. This need was addressed with the creation of PAME, founded on 3 April 1999.

In its constitution, PAME is described as ‘an open, wide, uniting, democratic trade-union *front* of employees and workers, seeking to have in its lines the most vibrant, fighting forces of the working trade-union movement’ (PAME 1999). In practice, PAME can be defined as a structure that aims to coordinate the activity of trade unions that are controlled by KKE members and cadres without being formally linked to the KKE. Despite the fact that PAME’s leading cadres are also predominately KKE members, there are certain non-communist trade union cadres, defined as ‘allies’, that participate. The KKE’s aim was to create a party-controlled quasi-trade-union organisation, with a centralised structure, but employing a looser recruitment logic. Although the KKE has always attempted to distinguish its own initiatives from PAME activity, the slogans and political positions were almost identical and many trade unionists affiliated to PAME were present at KKE marches or protests. It should be noted that PAME’s collective bodies and secretariats are in close collaboration with the respective KKE Central Committee (CC) sections that deal with the documentation of the party’s policy positions. Candidate selection for nearly all posts in PAME’s secretariats and local committees is closely controlled by the CC, and in many cases CC sections and PAME secretariats have co-published policy papers.

The experience of PAME was extremely fruitful for the KKE’s renewed tactics. In its first five years, PAME managed to consolidate its presence in many trade unions.³ PAME’s strength comes mainly from workers in the private sector, particularly construction, dock and textile workers, artists, typographers, hospital staff and employees in pharmaceutical companies. Where PAME does not control unions, either because the party’s forces are a minority or in workplaces without any union representation, KKE members form ‘militant committees’. A quasi-trade-union structure has thus taken shape to help workers who could not establish a union. PAME’s organisational success has provoked criticism from the other wings of the trade union movement which are represented in GSEE and claim that the unity of the movement is threatened by PAME’s mobilisation tactics. PAME has also considerably enhanced its contentious dynamics: during the 2000–07 period, strike hours increased from 384 to 672 hours per year in eight PAME-controlled trade union federations (Bithimitris 2008). Finally, PAME has been successfully used to serve the political aims of the KKE. For instance, PAME also started to mobilise its members for non-wage-related issues, as when it declared a 24-hour general strike against the Iraq War in 2003; PAME mobilises its followers in support of the KKE during electoral periods and many of its cadres are selected as candidate MPs, prefects, mayors, local councillors, etc.

The 17th Congress of the KKE (May 2005) identified PAME as the ‘basic pole of clustering’ for workers and other ‘allying social strata’ (KKE 2005). The increased share of votes gained by the party at the 2007 national elections (see Table 1) was essentially

attributed to the successful presence of PAME in civil society and to the strengthening of KKE's influence in low-income areas (Vernardakis 2011, pp. 106–108). This meant that strengthening PAME was KKE's key priority. One of the organisational consequences has been that the PAME model was transferred to KNE's student wing, the Πανσπουδαστική Κίνηση Συνεργασίας (All Students' Movement of Cooperation, PKS)⁴ with the formation of the 'Coordination Committee of Student Unions', a frontal structure that brought together unions and students close to PKS under central coordination and mirroring PAME's tactics in the student movement.

The relative success of KKE's top-down, vanguardist and sectarian approach put into practice through PAME can be attributed to the weakness of the official trade union confederations and the widespread perception that the latter were part and parcel of the corrupt, clientelistic system that has linked state and parties of government in Greece since the 1980s. PAME projected a well-organised, cohesive, combative and morally upright legitimising narrative, one that was designed to stand in stark contrast to the aforementioned flaws of the trade union 'establishment'. However, while the PAME approach has been effective in consolidating strong ties of support among a political subculture, in practice it has done little to establish significant environmental linkages understood as links to a broader array of social groups beyond its own ancillary structures.

The Coalition of the Left, Ecology and Social Movements (SYN) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)

SYN, founded in 1992, defined itself as a pluralist left party of democratic socialism, neither orthodox communist nor social democratic, supporting a mixed economy and placing a fresh emphasis on 'new issues', particularly feminism, democratic rights and the environment (Kalyvas & Marantzidis 2002). SYN's original core consisted of cadres whose political origins lay in the party of the Ελληνική Αριστερά (Greek Left [EAR]) founded in 1987 (in turn established after the KKE-es leadership's decision to dissolve the party and contribute to the foundation of a non-communist left party) and a large group of dissidents who broke ranks with the KKE in 1991. It also incorporated a number of individuals and small groups coming from left social democracy, ecologism and the extra-parliamentary left, as well as independents.

The party's founding document appealed to 'the men and women of work and culture, the young and the excluded'. This was explicitly not a class appeal, since SYN effectively presented itself as a catch-all party throughout the 1990s, one that aimed to be present in 'every nook and cranny of Greek society'. There was also an explicit trans-class appeal to groups affected by gender inequality and environmental degradation (SYN 1992). In practice, most of its vote share, membership and cadres have mainly been from among the ranks of highly educated employees in the public sector, professionals and small employers (Vernardakis 2011, pp. 108–110, 296–298). However, as a result of changes in internal factional dynamics, with the radical, protest-oriented Αριστερό Ρεύμα (Left Current) faction displacing the more

moderate (and sympathetic to government cooperation with PASOK) *Ανανεωτική Πτέρυγα* (Renewal Wing) in the party leadership after 2000 (Eleftheriou 2009), SYN shifted to a broadly defined class appeal aimed at targeting, primarily, younger cohorts and, secondarily, precariously employed workers in the services sector, social categories that were politically under-represented (SYN 2003).

In terms of participatory linkage SYN was meant to be a 'party of its members'. The statutes explicitly promoted members' direct participation in party policy-making, decision-making and candidate selection, giving extended powers to local branches. Sitings of the party's Central Political Committee (CPC) are open to members, as are the meetings of its departments, where party policy-making takes place and all interested members are invited to contribute. Members have the right to form 'tendencies' when this contributes to the free expression of opinion and to intra-party pluralism and debate. Internal party referenda are envisaged for major issues and have regularly been held to establish the order in which candidates for the European Parliament are placed on the party list. Elected regional committees have a decisive say on the list of candidates that will run in each constituency; local branches are also entirely sovereign to decide on candidates to local elections except in large cities and regions where decisions are made by the CPC. The party's president is elected by Congress (SYN 2005).

While SYN can indeed be considered an internally democratic party that invites members' participation, the operation of institutionalised factions in many cases distorts the members' voice, while many of the above-mentioned participative procedures have often become the locus of factional friction (Eleftheriou 2009; Tsakatika 2009; Vernardakis 2011, pp. 290–292). Moreover, low levels of participation in party procedures and the relative financial weakness of many local branches (a broad network of which was inherited largely by the KKE-es and EAR when SYN was set up) in practice do much to centralise party decision-making procedures. By the end of the 1990s, a considerable proportion of its members were disappointed by what they saw as the party's factionalism and excessive introspection and the party's membership was in decline.⁵

SYN's organisational response both to the primary aim of appealing to younger cohorts and to its own members' grievances about the internal functioning of the party came in 2001. It involved establishing a political and electoral alliance with a host of smaller parties, groups and networks of the extra-parliamentary left in the context of the *Συνασπισμός της Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς* (Coalition of the Radical Left [SYRIZA]),⁶ which offered the party an open, pluralist, unitary and more radical profile. SYN was and remained (until 2012) the largest party in the SYRIZA coalition, representing at least 80 per cent of its cadres, activists and voters. SYRIZA was one of the core choices of the party's new leadership after 2000 and was promoted as part and parcel of the party's 'left turn', much to the dismay of the minority faction (Eleftheriou 2009). Setting up the SYRIZA coalition raised expectations that local party branches would open up to activists and non-members who are nonetheless 'active citizens' and that this would renew inter-party democracy and boost participation, particularly in

the period between 2004 and 2008 under the leadership of Alekos Alavanos. However, these expectations were not fulfilled, mostly because SYRIZA by and large remained an alliance at the leadership level and did not evolve into a political unit with greater political cohesion or proceed to a merging of organisations at the local level. Nonetheless, through SYRIZA the party did to some extent succeed in modifying its social representation and in halting membership decline. While membership by and large remained stable over the last decade at over 16,000, the make-up of party members has changed slightly: fewer members from higher-income educated strata (fewer in rich neighbourhoods, more in the countryside) and more people whose first party membership was of SYN rather than of the KKE or the KKE-es (approaching 50 per cent in the 2010 congress); younger new members who are from SYN Youth but also from elsewhere (interview no. 1).

SYN's approach to environmental linkage is heavily influenced by the tradition of the Italian left, which highlights the principles of mutuality and autonomy. For SYN, the role of the political left is 'not to guide but to participate in movements and try to influence them, while learning from them' (interview no. 5). Consistent with its attempt to reach out particularly to the younger cohorts, the most evident recent development in terms of SYN's links to civil society organisations has been its effort to establish contacts with the new social movements that emerged over the decade and were mostly associated with younger generations of activists. Νεολαία Συνασπισμού (SYN Youth), the party's youth organisation, has been the key intermediary between the party and the social movements; its members range in age from 16 to 28 years. Until 2012 SYN Youth numbered about 1,500 members, most of whom were university students (interview no. 6). SYN Youth's foundation and consolidation (1999–2006) was coterminous with its engagement with the anti-globalisation movement, which meant that its identity and core policy agenda (social rights, anti-hierarchy, anti-capitalism, radical ecology, feminism, an international as opposed to a European horizon of struggle) were deeply influenced by it. It was mainly SYN Youth cadres that were the motivating force behind the formation of the Ελληνικό Κοινωνικό Φόρουμ (Greek Social Forum [EKF]) and the 20-member coordinating committee of the 4th European Social Forum (ESF) that took place in Athens in 2006. SYN Youth's strong presence in the 4th ESF was partly due to the fact that the event was supported economically and logistically with resources that SYN's trade unionists managed to squeeze out of GSEE (interviews nos 2 and 3). It can also be partly explained by the fact that the KKE had decided not to join the EKF. SYN Youth has also been visibly involved in the anti-war movement (2003), the movement of solidarity towards immigrants, the university students' movement (2006, 2007) and, more controversially, the anti-authoritarian movement that emerged after the police shooting of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos in Athens in December 2008.

While SYN's newly leading faction was initially hesitant, in due course it encouraged and particularly after 2004 actively supported its youth wing's engagement with social movements. This was due to the fact that young SYN cadres and young people more generally (SYN's core target group) were not inclined to become active in Greek trade

unions, as they perceived them as too bureaucratic and dominated by mainstream political forces, whereas the prospect of participation in social movements seemed to be more palatable (interview no. 2). SYN Youth drew in numerous new recruits from among the young activists of the new social movements, building up its cadre pool and preparing them for leadership roles in the party. Furthermore, a new microcosm was created around SYN Youth which helped integrate not only young recruits but also new members and sympathisers of SYN. The festival of SYN Youth and its summer camp, to provide two examples, became popular annual meeting places for 'the people of the left'. Through leadership overlap and cooptation (Schwartz 2005) among leading social movement activists, as well as through the creation of a new microcosm to integrate them, SYN and its youth organisation were thus highly successful in their aims when it came to cultivating links to social movements.

SYN also attempted to reorganise and strengthen its links to trade unions, but with limited results. Its activity unfolded at two levels: first, at confederation level, the group *Αυτόνομη Παρέμβαση* (Autonomous Intervention [AI]) was founded in 2002 with the purpose of being the face of the trade unionists close to the party in the elected executive boards of both major trade union confederations. Its greatest strength is in the public sector, particularly among education and health professionals and in the professional associations of lawyers, engineers, etc., while in the private sector its support is mainly in the former state utilities (now mostly privatised). The formation of AI did not augment the party's influence in the trade union movement, although that influence remained stable over the decade.⁷ Formally AI is independent from SYN but in practice it is closely linked to the party through membership and cadre overlap. Informal coordination takes places through the Department of Labour policy of the party's CPC, in which the leading cadres of AI participate. Autonomous Intervention makes its own decisions but within the parameters of SYN/SYRIZA positions (interview no. 3).

Second, the *Δίκτυο Συνδικαλιστών ΣΥΡΙΖΑ* (SYRIZA Network of Trade Unionists) was assembled in 2007, the purpose of which was to contribute to the horizontal coordination of new trade unions, active at the first level of the trade union pyramid (Tsakiris 2010). In contrast to PAME's sectarian logic, the network's aim was not 'to substitute, but to complement' action at the level of trade union confederations (interviews nos 2 and 3). New trade unions, which in some instances do not participate in one of the GSEE's federations or centres, cover workers in publishing, telecoms, computers, courier services, translation and new banking services, members aged under 35 years being their backbone (interview no. 3). The SYRIZA network, however, did not succeed in bringing the party any considerable gains in terms of recruiting cadres or increasing its political influence in the new unions.

SYN's internal democratic operation and openness to new members, activists and supporters as well as its pluralist and unitary appeal to social movements and organisations of civil society were successful only in part over the last decade, particularly with regard the new ties it built with younger cohorts and social movements but less so with groups of precarious private sector workers and the trade

union movement. Pluralism was a double-edged sword: SYN was internally plagued by political division and factional strife throughout most of the last decade, a state of affairs that in turn limited its potential appeal to a broader range of disaffected citizens, members and civil society groups.

The Greek Radical Left in the Economic Crisis

The 2008 financial crisis marked the beginning of a new era for Greek politics. Not long after 2009, when PASOK defeated the ruling ND in a landslide election, the global financial crisis reached Greece, giving rise to a dramatic sovereign debt crisis. The country's government resorted to 'bailout' packages provided by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on condition they implemented unprecedented fiscal austerity measures, rapid structural reforms and extensive privatisation of state resources. The policies introduced led to severe recession and a rise in unemployment levels, and the sovereign debt crisis was quickly transformed into an economic crisis, which in turn triggered a full-scale political crisis.

Levels of social mobilisation had been on the rise since 2009, with tens of thousands participating in street demonstrations against government austerity policies, the emergence of new social movements, and general strikes called by the trade unions (Kouvelakis 2011). The post-1974 two-party system was already heavily threatened by the rising tide of anti-party sentiment, which reflected generalised perceptions of the incompetence of the mainstream parties (the centre-left PASOK and the centre-right ND) (Constantinidis & Tsakatika 2011), defections of leading MPs from their ranks and increasing levels of social protest; after three years of political instability, the system collapsed in the dual elections of May and June 2012. New Democracy's strength was halved and PASOK's vote share diminished by 75 per cent. Three new political actors emerged, each winning around seven per cent of the vote, namely the party of the Δημοκρατική Αριστερά (Democratic Left, DIMAR), a recent split from SYN, Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες (Independent Greeks), a recent split from ND, and the extreme-right Χρυσή Αυγή (Golden Dawn).

Another equally important development was the major shift that took place in the electoral geography of the radical left. Both SYN and the KKE had over the last decade followed a consistent protest strategy which opposed government policies and prioritised linkage to their members, trade unions and social movements; they had also taken a clear-cut policy position against the austerity measures and supported the strikes and social mobilisation that emerged with all their available political and organisational resources. As a result, they were less subject to the legitimacy crisis that hit the party system in 2012 and found themselves in a stronger position with respect to their mainstream competitors. SYN/SYRIZA nevertheless was the party that benefited spectacularly from the two electoral battles and managed to overtake KKE in vote share for the first time in their common history (Table 1). While SYRIZA nearly quadrupled its vote share (see Table 1), hijacking the PASOK vote particularly among less privileged, unemployed and younger groups (Vernardakis 2012), the KKE's share of the vote was

halved, with grave losses to SYRIZA. A new coalition government was formed by ND, PASOK and DIMAR in June 2012, SYRIZA becoming the country's second-largest political force and taking on the main opposition role after transforming itself into a unified party. While the two radical left parties' different approaches to linkage highlight only one of the factors that contributed to SYRIZA's rise and the KKE's downfall, it is clear that SYRIZA's linkage strategy was more successful over the crisis period. In the remainder of this section we will try to identify the main reasons.

After 2010, internal pluralism stopped being a weakness for SYN and SYRIZA, turning into a clear advantage. The exit of the 'Renewal Wing' faction from SYN (which evolved into DIMAR) in the summer of 2010 curtailed political disagreement and factional infighting within SYN and resulted in the effective dominance of Alexis Tsipras's leadership in both SYN and SYRIZA. In turn, this development (together with certain facets of Greek electoral law that favour parties over coalitions of parties) facilitated the decision to transform SYRIZA into a unified party on the eve of the June 2012 elections. The process of organisational refoundation is currently underway. SYRIZA's coalitional structure, internal pluralism and openness, as well as the fact that it was itself a work in progress, provided an organisational locus that could easily include new groups, movements, activists and individual supporters that approached the coalition before and after the 2012 elections, mostly after abandoning PASOK. In that sense, SYRIZA's participatory linkage made it easier for the party to adapt to rapid electoral change. In contrast, KKE's centralised structure, strict membership policy, further organisational consolidation along sectoral/professional lines and the streamlining of all its other ancillary organisations (KNE 2010, pp. 19–24; interviews nos 4 and 7) to mirror PAME and suit its needs (Eleftheriou 2011) rendered the party more rigid and sectarian and made adaptation to the new situation difficult. KKE's participatory linkage strategy seemed to be relatively successful while voter preferences were relatively stable but proved ineffective at times of deep social change.

The greatest challenge for both parties' environmental linkage strategy was the emergence of new confrontational forms of social protest, such as 'Won't Pay', a movement of civil disobedience by citizens who refused to pay tolls on many of the country's highways (Tsakiris & Aranitou 2012) and, more crucially, the Greek 'Indignants' movement. The Indignants started out in May 2011 as an anti-party and anti-political protest movement that occupied central squares in Athens and other major Greek cities (Georgiadou, Kafe & Pierides 2012) but was soon transformed into a hothouse for the ideas of both the radical left and the nationalist right. In practice the Indignants contested KKE's dominance of social mobilisation through PAME, and invited harsh criticism of the party. According to the KKE, the Indignants' protests were instigated by SYRIZA, the extra-parliamentary left and nationalists who 'chose to conceal their political identity and exploit the demonstrators' anger' (interview no. 9). Only the protests called by PAME were conducted according to appropriate organisational principles and were endowed with a genuine anti-systemic political orientation. These were features that the Indignants' movement lacked, according to the KKE (Gogos 2011). This was a familiar line of argument that the KKE had adopted

against most social movements, including the global justice movement, over the decade. In contrast to the KKE, SYN was positively supportive of the ‘Won’t Pay!’ movement (Tsakiris & Aranitou 2012), while some of SYN’s cadres also played an active role in the Indignants movement. Economists and intellectuals close to the party as well as members of SYN Youth participated and on occasion played a leading role in the general assembly and the panel discussions that were organised in Athens’s Syntagma Square. The Indignants were not, however, a product of SYRIZA’s steering: they were initially organised through social networking sites by mostly young, progressive and educated non-partisans (interview no. 8). SYN stood as an informal advocate of the movement in the political sphere and offered a political narrative that explained and justified the movement’s emergence. In that sense, it largely succeeded in being identified with the Indignants movement regardless of its actual contribution to the latter’s onset.

At the level of trade unions, PAME called and organised its own strikes at national, sectoral and local level. A very successful example of a local strike was the 264-day strike at the Aspropyrgos Steel Industry, which mobilised local KKE support committees (‘Popular Committees’) throughout the neighbouring cities and several PAME-affiliated trade unions. On certain occasions, national PAME strikes were planned for the same days as the general strikes called by GSEE and *Ανώτατη Διοίκηση Ενώσεων Δημοσίων Υπαλλήλων* (Confederation of Greek Civil Servants’ Trade Unions, ADEDY). However, the demonstrations that PAME called were deliberately separate from those called by the other trade unions. In contrast, SYN, AI and the SYRIZA network of trade unionists actively supported the general strikes called by GSEE and ADEDY. SYN’s influence in trade unions was limited until 2012 and therefore this was not an area where it could make its presence strongly felt between 2008 and 2012. The crisis initially challenged SYN and SYRIZA by exposing their weakness in the labour movement, but their unitary appeal for a cohesive and combative trade union movement was successful in that it made it easier for former PASOK-affiliated trade unionists to approach SYRIZA after the 2012 elections.

All things considered, SYRIZA’s political support of social movements and inclusive discourse gave the impression of a coalition eager to cooperate with and unite a broad range of social and political forces. On the contrary, the KKE’s vanguardism and refusal to cooperate with other forces of the left, including SYRIZA, cost it dearly in terms of its appeal to a broader electorate as well as to its own voters and members. It seems that SYRIZA capitalised on its pro-movement stance, while the KKE was punished for its sectarian stance by the very strata that were the focus of its political appeals.

Conclusions

Principally in response to the fact that their social legitimacy had been considerably weakened in the early 1990s, KKE and SYN turned to an old but neglected friend from the late 1990s onwards: civil society. All things considered, their decade-long efforts up to 2012 can be deemed successful in electoral terms. Electoral results can certainly not

be directly and fully attributed to the parties' linkage strategies, nor do they accurately reflect the perception of their social legitimacy among the electorate. Nonetheless, both parties had ensured their parliamentary representation and stabilised their share of the vote; they even made modest gains in the national elections, particularly after 2007 (Table 1). More importantly, they were successful in strengthening their participatory and environmental linkages in terms of stabilising their membership, creating 'microcosms', or subcultures through which they socialised and integrated their members and sympathizers, and forging new ties to, respectively, the labour movement (KKE) and the new social movements (SYN).

Legacy plays a significant part in explaining the difference in the way the two parties of the left went about pursuing linkage and the implications for their own organisational and programmatic development. Both parties' ideological origins and organisational models predisposed them to make specific choices about the type of linkage they could pursue and with whom, which in turn fed back into those templates, reinforcing them, following a 'path-dependent' logic (Hall & Taylor 1996). Those entrenched linkage strategies were put to the test by external events. While the KKE's approach to linkage counter-intuitively seemed to be more successful over the best part of the decade, SYRIZA's approach which emphasised pluralism and openness to social movements proved more adept in the fluid political environment of the 2008–12 period. It seems that the economic crisis has radically altered the Greek party system, presenting SYN/SYRIZA and KKE with roles that are very different from those they were accustomed to. Whether their 'turn towards civil society' will survive electoral defeat in the case of the KKE, and government-in-waiting status in the case of SYRIZA, remains to be seen.

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Notes

- [1] Union density in Greece is estimated to have dropped from 34 per cent in 1990 to 24 per cent in 2008 (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2011).
- [2] GSEE represents private sector employees as well as workers from sectors formerly in the broader public sector, such as telecommunications, energy and banks, which make up the bulk of its membership. It consists of trade union federations—organised on a sectoral basis—and labour centres—organised on a territorial basis. Federations and labour centres consist of first-level unions. In political terms GSEE—much likeADEDY, the other main Greek trade union confederation—was dominated until 2012 by trade unionists affiliated primarily to the centre-left PASOK and in second place to the centre-right ND.

- [3] PAME's strength in GSEE has been extremely stable over the years, at about 21 per cent.
- [4] Influence in the students' unions varied between five and ten per cent until 1996 and since 2000 the figure has stabilised above 15 per cent.
- [5] SYN had 22,971 members when the party was established in 1992 and then gradually declined to 16,376 in 2004 (Eleftheriou 2009). In June 2010 a minor party split led to about 3000 members leaving the party to form DIMAR (interview no. 1).
- [6] The components of SYRIZA—apart from SYN—in 2012 were as follows: the Trotskyist groups Κόκκινο (Red), Διεθνιστική Εργατική Αριστερά (Internationalist Workers' Left, DEA) and Ξεκίνημα (Beginning); the Maoist group Κομμουνιστική Οργάνωση Ελλάδας (Communist Organisation of Greece, KOE); the KKE dissidents' Κίνηση για την Ενότητα Δράσης της Αριστεράς (Movement for the Unity of Action of the Left, KEDA); the left social-democratic party Δημοκρατικό Κοινωνικό Κίνημα, DIKKI); Manolis Glezos's (a prominent figure of the Greek Resistance) Ενεργοί Πολίτες (Active Citizens); the Οικοσοσιαλιστές Ελλάδας (Ecosocialists of Greece); the political group of PASOK dissidents Νέος Αγωνιστής (New Fighter); the small left groups Ομάδα Ρόζα (Rosa Group), Ριζοσπάστες (Radicals) and Αντικαπιταλιστική Πολιτική Ομάδα (Anticapitalist Political Group, APO).
- [7] AI has steadily commanded about six per cent in GSEE and eight per cent in ADEDY.

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- Interview 1 Secretary of SYN's Central Political Committee, Athens, 5 April 2011.
- Interview 2 Member of SYN's Political Secretariat, former secretary of AI, Athens, 6 April 2011.
- Interview 3 Member of SYN's Political Secretariat, Central Political Committee Department of Labour Policy, Athens, 6 April 2011.
- Interview 4 President of the Federation of Greek Women (OGE), Athens, 7 April 2011.
- Interview 5 Member of SYN's Political Secretariat, former secretary of SYN Youth, leading activist in Greek Social Forum, Athens, 7 April 2011.
- Interview 6 Secretary of SYN Youth, Athens, 2 June 2011.
- Interview 7 Member of Students' Militant Front (MAS) executive secretariat, member of KNE central council, Athens, 6 June 2011.
- Interview 8 Social activist, journalist, SYN's consultant on social media, Skype interview, 14 November 2011.
- Interview 9 Member of PAME's Youth Secretariat, member of KKE's Central Committee Trade Union Department, Athens, 23 December 2011.

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